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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002927

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [ET](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: SFRC STAFFER PHELAN VISIT TOUCHES ON WAR
IN SOMALIA, DEMOCRACY AT HOME

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 02877
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 02872
[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 02865

Classified By: CHARGE VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.4(b)AND(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a series of meetings during a visit to Ethiopia, SFRC Staffer Phelan inquired about issues at the forefront of Ethiopian politics) engagement in Somalia and progress in deepening democracy. Regarding Somalia, Phelan was told by GoE officials that Ethiopia is ready to eliminate the threat of jihadists, if and when the CIC moves into Baidoa. The Ethiopia military is confident that any conflict with the CIC will be quick and decisive. On domestic matters, Phelan engaged with opposition parliamentarians and encouraged them to continue their dialogue with the GoE to foster a stronger democracy. He also discussed with GoE officials the ongoing trial of CUD leadership, stressing that the USG is closely following the proceedings to ensure that the trial is speedy, fair and transparent. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer Michael Phelan visited Addis Ababa October 25-27 and held a series of meetings to discuss regional security matters as well and the internal Ethiopian political environment. Those meetings which were primarily focused on regional security matters included LTG Samora Yonus, Chief of General Staff, Ethiopian National Defense Forces; (ENDF), Tekeda Alemu, State Minister for Foreign Affairs; and an Ambassadors lunch hosted by Charge which included numerous European and African Ambassadors to Ethiopia. In the meeting with LTG Samora, Charge and SFRC Staffer Phelan were joined by CJTF-HOA Admiral Hunt, DATT Donald Zedler and Poloff. In the meeting with Tekeda, Charge and SFRC Staffer Phelan and Poloff were joined by USG delegation including Ret. Gen Carl Fulford and Amb. Peter Chaveas from the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), Gen. Remkis from EUCOM J5. SFRC Staffer Phelan also met with PM Meles (reftels A and B).

[1](#)3. (SBU) SFRC Staffer Phelan discussed internal political issues with Minister of Information Bereket Simon, as well as with opposition leaders Dr. Merera Gudina, United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF); Lidetu Ayalew, United Ethiopian Democratic Party-Medhin (UEDP-Medhin); Bulcha Demeksa, Oromo People Democratic Movement (OPDM); and Ayele Chamisso, Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP). Phelan was accompanied in both of these meetings by P/E Counselor and Poloff. Phelan also met with the Chairman of the Independent Inquiry Commission, Mekonnen Dilgasa (reftel C).

SOMALIA CONTINUES AT FOREFRONT OF ETHIOPIAN EXTERNAL ISSUES

14. (C) In a wide ranging discussion with various European and African Ambassadors to Ethiopia, Charge and SFRC Staffer Phelan surveyed participants on reactions to the current situation in Somalia, resulting in spirited deliberations how best to move forward. French Ambassador Stephan Gompertz reported that though Paris has not yet decided on how to proceed, there are essentially two options) either fully support dialogue through the Khartoum talks, or push for action in assembling the IGASOM force from Uganda) both of which he admitted have serious disadvantages. European Union Ambassador Tim Clarke said that the EU has also not been able to present unified support for either option, as EU countries differ widely in opinion. This was evident during the discussion as German Ambassador Class Knoop voiced doubts at the CIC's sincerity in finding an agreement at the Khartoum talks, whereas Italian Ambassador Rafaelle de Lutio said that, while maintaining pressure on the CIC is necessary, the international community should concentrate on ensuring that the talks continue. The Ugandan DCM, Idule Amoko, reported that Uganda is prepared to send peacekeeping troops if and when such a decision is made by the AU and the international community. Canadian Ambassador Yves Boulanger remarked that, either way, conflict between CIC and the Somali TFG, and by extension Ethiopia, is likely unavoidable. Despite the myriad opinions on the most effective way to prevent war in Somalia, most Ambassadors agreed that additional delays by the international community will likely be counterproductive.

15. (C) In discussing regional issues, Deputy Foreign Minister

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Tekeda said that, though Eritrea is always an issue for Ethiopia, Somalia is the major priority at this time. Though he characterized accusations that Ethiopia would react hastily to regional conflict as "hogwash," he did say that Ethiopia would respond to defend its "national interests." When asked if he is confident that a peaceful solution in Somalia is possible, Tekeda responded that, "it depends." Though he said that support within the African Union for intervention is gaining strength, he expressed doubt that an IGASOM force would be approved before the CIC moves on Baidoa. He also reported that Foreign Minister Seyoum had productive talks with Kenyan and Ugandan presidents on a recent trip, and that discussions will continue during the upcoming China-African summit in Beijing. When asked whether religion is a factor in Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia, Tekeda responded saying, "To begin with, Ethiopia is not strictly speaking a Christian country," and that "the values of the CIC are not (our) problem until they attempt to extend them (to Ethiopia)." However, he added that if Ethiopia did not involve itself in Somalia, then Baidoa and subsequently Puntland, Somaliland and the rest of the country would fall under control of the CIC. He concluded that, "Islamists will always be part of (the government of) Somalia - that will not change. But the jihadists cannot be allowed to take charge."

16. (C) LTG Samora was blunt in his prioritization of regional matters for Ethiopia, saying, "I have forgotten about Eritrea for now. They are doing their job in Somalia," in reference to allegation that Eritrea is training and supplying the CIC. During the meeting he repeatedly conveyed Ethiopia's position on support for the TFG, indicating that "we will not let them be attacked," and adding that, "If we are provoked, we will not stop." LTG Samora claimed that the CIC was receiving significant help from abroad, including training and arms from Eritrea, and 14 battalions of rebel fighters from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), as well as unspecified help from Arab counties. Despite this, he was very confident that if Ethiopia engages the CIC following an attack on Baidoa, that the conflict would be short-lived. "we will not go in for

the long-term," he said, adding, "We will do it quickly." LTG Samora claimed that, "the Islamists do not have the support of the people," and that they are fundamentally weak since their military strength comes from Ethiopian rebels. He acknowledged that the ENDF is currently training 4 units of TFG soldiers in Baidoa, but that they desperately need equipment to fight advancing UIC. He said that the ENDF is prepared to supply light arms and ammunition, but that the TFG army needs larger equipment in order to defeat the CIC on its own.

ETHIOPIAN OPPOSITION DISCUSS POLITICAL SPACE

17. (SBU) In response to SFRC Staffer Phlelan's question about political improvements following their decision to join parliament, opposition parliamentarians were divided (as usual) in their answers. While UEDP-Medhin Lidetu praised the GoE for opening up political space and engaging the opposition on democratic development, others were more critical. OFDM chief Bulcha, in a decidedly negative tone, said that the best thing about joining parliament was that that he was "not thrown in jail" (a reference to the jailed CUD leadership). Pressed by the Charge, the more resilient parliamentarians conceded that in fact the inter-party dialogues seemed to be progressing, but that the most important factors - reform of the National Election Board (NEB) and the media law - were yet to be finalized. Lidetu said that he current NEB does not have the confidence of the voters, but that he expects the GOE to appoint new, independent leadership. He pointed out that once discussions on the NEB and media law are concluded, fair competition will be possible in next year's local elections. Oromo leaders Bulcha and Merera were less positive, emphasizing that their party members continued to be jailed. Bulcha told Phelan that, regarding the detention of Oromos, PM Meles told him the GoE would "arrest them, investigate, and then release those that are not (proved to be) OLF." Merera added that he feels "the democracy process is frozen," and that he sees no benefit by having chosen to participate in parliament. Ayele demonstrated that he was in between these two extremes. On

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one hand, he said that the CUD has "suffered more than any other party. Our supporters were jailed, beaten and tortured." However, since the reformation of the CUDE in early 2006, he reported that the party is now in dialogue and working with the government. Specifically, he mentioned that "before we could not gather (our) people together to talk, or we would be thrown in jail," but recently in a meeting with PM Meles, Ayele was told, "You can now organize, if it is done peacefully."

18. (SBU) Information Minister Bereket told SFRC Staffer Phelan that the Ethiopian-American relationship is "at its best right now." Economically, Ethiopia is on the right track, he said, and cited economic growth rates and falling unemployment. Bereket said that focus of the GoE right now is improving practices of good governance. He added, however, that Ethiopia is culturally and religiously complex and that an improving political situation requires that all parties to work together. He said that the GoE is committed to changing, learning from its past shortcomings. As an example, he referred to the violence of November 2005, in which "remnants of the former Derg military regime organized street violence and created a bad situation in which many people died, including 7 police officers." He said that the GoE formed an independent commission to look into the situation and the GoE's response. Regarding the trial of the CUD leadership, Phelan stressed the need to resolve the matter quickly and to reduce some of the more serious and difficult to prove charges. However, Bereket responded that the GoE remains convinced that those in jail are responsible for the violent clashes last year and that the trial will continue on until the courts render a verdict.

19. (C) SFRC Staffer Phelan's meetings in Ethiopia primarily concentrated on the current situation in Somalia and the democratic process following the events of 2005. Regarding Somalia, it was clear from GoE officials that Ethiopia is prepared to confront the CIC and that, if or when Ethiopia engages, it intends to eliminate the threat of jihadists. On internal matters, Phalen stressed the importance of continuing the multi-party dialogues as a means of creating greater space for opposition parties and strengthening Ethiopia's developing democracy. Phelan also pressed the GoE to quickly resolve the ongoing trial of the CUD leaders and to reduce some of the more serious and difficult to prove charges. However, the GoE remains steadfast that those in jail are responsible for the widespread violence and destruction and that the trial must run its course. Bereket stressed that, in the end, whatever verdict is decided, the GoE will not appeal.
HUDDLESTON